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ABSTRACT

Different areas and regions of the nation have characteristically different rural high school systems due to differences in socioeconomic status of the residents, racial or ethnic membership, and family background. Differences in staffing patterns, enrollment levels, and school budgets are also characteristics that help to differentiate rural and urban high schools. This paper examines these characteristics of rural schools in Ohio and Southwest Georgia, as they pertain to rural students' aspirations and expectations. Twelfth grade students in 19 rural public secondary schools in Ohio and Georgia completed surveys. The population makeup of the schools was very different, with Georgia rural schools having a black enrollment of over 80%, whereas rural schools in Ohio were almost entirely white. Ohio rural students enjoyed a slightly higher standard of living, but parents in both states had similar levels of educational attainment, though the proportion of parents with college experience was somewhat greater in Ohio than in Georgia. More Ohio students planned to attend four-year colleges and universities, and they expected to enter higher status occupations than the Georgia students. Ohio students indicated they were more confident of entering their chosen occupations. The report concludes that policymakers should review such findings, for national policies may not have equal import in all regions. This paper contains 10 references. (DHP)

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Rural Aspirations and Expectations of Ohio and Georgia Secondary Students

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Introduction

Fifty-three percent of the nation's educationally deprived children live in rural areas (Carmicheal, 1982). Rural adults and youth are the products of an educational system that has historically short changed rural people (Sher, 1975). According to Gjelten and Nachtigal(1979), rural education has been backward, less well financed, poorly staffed, offered fewer educational opportunities and turned out students less equipped to cope with an industrialized society.

Region is important for predicting school experiences and students in the south are farthest behind in achievement and attainment (Parks, 1983). The standard of living and quality of education is lower in the south than in the northern portion of the nation with the south having the highest incidence of poverty (Bedics, 1987). The south also has the weakest tradition of support for public education (Parks, 1983). In comparison to northern states, southern states generally have a poorer quality rural educational system with southern Blacks and Whites consistently ranking below the national average (Marion, 1979).

Different areas and regions of the nation have characteristically different rural high school systems due to differences in socioeconomic status of the residents, race or ethnic groups, and family background of the students as well as enrollment, staff and budget of the schools. These apparent differences have produced a need for other areas of the nation to be studied due to the fact that studies conducted in Ohio (Odell, 1986), or New Mexico (Edington, Pettibone, & Hedlt, 1975), or even the Southeastern portion of the United States (Lee, 1984) cannot be generalized to specific geographic locations with different characteristics. MacBrayne (1987) states, "because studies used various instruments for measuring the variables examined and because rural cultures vary from states to state, and even within states, one should be cautious in generalizing findings from one region to another." The educational and occupational aspirations and expectations developed and possessed by rural secondary school students during high school have a

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significant influence upon their eventual educational and occupational attainment (Odell, 1986).

Purpose and Objectives

The main purpose of these studies was to describe the nature of rural schools in Ohio and Southwest Georgia. The specific objectives were to: (1) describe the personal, educational and family background characteristics of rural students; (2) assess the level of occupational and educational aspirations and expectations; and, (3) describe the similarities and differences between the rural students in Ohio and Southwest Georgia.

Procedures

Population and Sample

The target population in Southwest Georgia consisted of 19 rural public secondary schools. The criteria used in selecting rural schools in Southwest Georgia included: (1) those schools located in a county outside a Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA), (2) a county with a population greater than 40,000, and, (3) schools with an average class size of less than 200 students. The target population in Ohio consisted of 71 public secondary schools. The criteria used in selecting Ohio rural schools from an earlier study by Odell (1986) was followed: The criteria for a rural school in Ohio included: (1) public school located in a county outside the SMSA, as defined by the Ohio population census; (2) public school in a county with a total population under 40,000; and, (3) an average class size of less than 125 students.

The frame for the Southwest Georgia school was from the 1987-1988 Georgia Educational Directory. The frame for the Ohio rural schools was from the 1987-1988 Ohio Educational Directory. Sampling of the Southwest Georgia rural schools was done using the simple random sampling. A total of five schools were selected. The sampling of Ohio's rural schools was done using stratified and simple random sampling. The four Ohio rural schools randomly selected and stratified in Odell (1986) were included in the sample. Six additional Ohio rural schools were randomly selected without regard to stratification for a total sample size of 10 rural schools

Subject Selection

In each rural high school selected in Ohio and Southwest Georgia, the twelfth grade students were the subjects. The students were enrolled in the 1988-1989 school year. Representation of the Ohio and Southwest Georgia rural schools was made by a census of the senior class.

Research Design

The descriptive survey method of research was used to collect the data for describing and comparing the characteristics of Southwest Georgia and Ohio public secondary schools and twelfth grade students.

Instrumentation

The instrument was developed after a careful review of literature and from a previously utilized instrument. The questionnaires used in Ohio were previously used in earlier rural studies conducted by McCracken and Odell in 1985.

Content validity was established with the use of a panel of experts in the Ohio State University Department of Agricultural Education faculty, former administrators, high school teachers, and graduate students. A group of twelfth grade students and administrators in a rural school that was not a part of the sample but were part of the targeted population served as the subjects for a pilot test to determine the reliability of the instrument. The researcher used test-retest reliability. The average test-retest percent of agreement coefficient was .81.

The Student Information Questionnaire (SIQ) used in Ohio followed similar procedures. The content and face validity was established with a panel of experts also at the Ohio State University Department of Agricultural Education, former school officials, and teachers. The reliability of the SIQ was tested and reported by Odell (1986). A test-retest reliability coefficient of .84 was reported.

Data Collection

The data for this study was collected during March-May 1989. The data collection procedures used in Southwest Georgia was similar to the procedures used in Ohio. An introductory letter was mailed to each principal for the selected rural schools explaining the purpose of the study and informing them that they will be contacted by phone. The phone call to the principal was used to obtain permission to include the school in the study and to explain the research and procedures that would be used. The questionnaires were administered by the researcher to the subjects selected in each rural school selected in Southwest Georgia. The twelfth-grade students who were present on the day the data were collected and who had returned parental permission forms were administered the student questionnaire. A total of 267 rural students completed questionnaires. Student numbers were used for confidentiality in dealing with information from student school records and were placed on the questionnaires before being administered.

The data collection procedures used in Ohio was similar. An introductory letter was sent to the superintendents explaining the purpose of the study and informing them that they would be contacted by phone. The phone call to the superintendents was also used to obtain permission to include the school in the study and to explain the research and procedures that would be used. The questionnaires were distributed to each school with written instructions. School officials under the supervision of the principal administered the SIQs. A total of 529 Ohio rural students completed the SIQs.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, measures of central tendency, and variability were used to organize and summarize the data.

Results

Students Personal and Educational Characteristics

Gender

Southwest Georgia and Ohio rural schools both had slightly more females than males.

Ethnic Background

In Southwest Georgia, 73.4% of the students were Black and 24% were White. In Ohio over 94% responding were White.

Program Enrollment

Program enrollment for Ohio students was as follows: academic (58.0%), general (22.9%), and vocational (19.1%). In Southwest Georgia, 38% of the students enrolled in academic, 33.5% in general, and 27.4 in vocational programs.

Extracurricular Involvement

Among Ohio rural students, over 43% of the students participated in only one or two activities, about 25% participated in three or more, and over 18% participated in no activities. In Southwest Georgia rural schools over 28% of the student were involved in no extra-curricular activities, over 44% were involved in one or two activities and almost 28% of the students were involved in three or more activities. There was no difference between groups in the mean number of activities participated in by each student.

Socioeconomic Status

Fathers of the Southwest Georgia and Ohio rural school students had a higher mean occupational status when compared to Mothers. The socioeconomic status level of the Ohio students was higher than the rural Georgia students.

Educational Attainment of Parents

Among rural Ohio parents, 13.7% of the fathers and 7.1% of the mothers had less than a high school education. In Southwest Georgia 22.5% of the fathers and 14.6% of the mothers had less than a high school education.

Parental Discussions

Most students (over 94%) in both groups had discussed their educational plans with their parents.

Parental Expectations

Almost 61% of the Ohio students said their parents expected them to attend college and almost 23% were not expected to attend college. Almost 72% of the Southwest Georgia students felt their parents expected them to continue their education after high school while only 7.5% felt their parents did not expect them to continue their education.

Number of Siblings

The mean number of siblings reported by Southwest Georgia rural students was 3.5, while the mean number reported by rural Ohio students was 2.8.

Educational and Occupational Aspirations and Expectations

Plans for Advanced Education

Over 80% of the Southwest Georgia rural students indicated that they would continue their education after high school and over 73% of the rural Ohio high school indicated they were likely to continue their education.

Type of Planned Advanced Education

Over 47% of the Ohio students planned on attending four-year colleges and almost 35% planned on attending technical or junior colleges. Over 32% of the Southwest Georgia students said they were likely to attend a four-year college, 17.6% were likely to attend a junior college, while 22.5% were likely to attend a technical college.

When Advanced Education Would Begin

Over 48.3% of the Southwest Georgia students said they would begin their college education directly after high school, 11.6% would begin after military service, and 6% would begin after working a few years. Over 61% of the rural Ohio students planned on attending college directly after high school, almost 6% were going to college after military service, and over 10% planned on going after working a few years.

Planned Area of Study

Ohio rural students chose business first followed by the following areas: health, engineering, and education. Southwest Georgia rural students chose business, health, and computer science, respectively.

Occupational Aspirations

Almost 14% of the Southwest Georgia rural students chose engineering, architectural, mathematical and scientific jobs, 12.4% chose agriculture and forestry work, over 11% chose health technologies, and another 10.5% chose marketing and sales related occupations. Among Ohio rural students over 13% chose executive, administrative, and managerial occupations, almost 12% chose

teaching, librarian, and counseling work, while over 9% chose engineering and architectural fields of work. Ohio students aspired to higher status occupations than Georgia students.

When Occupational Choice Was Made

Most students in both groups made their occupational choice in the eleventh and twelfth grades.

Occupational Expectations

Ohio rural students primarily chose the following: almost 13% expected to be teachers, librarians, and counselors; 11% expected to be health technologist; 11% expected to be writers, artists, performers, and athletes; and 10% planned to be in executive, administrative and managerial occupations. Over 11% of the Southwest Georgia students expected to enter executive, administrative or managerial type work; over 10% expected to be engineers, architects, scientists or mathematicians; and almost 11% expected to enter the military.

Expected Income

Slightly over 25% of the Southwest Georgia students expected to earn over $30,000 in their first year of work, and over 54% expected to earn less than $25,000 in their first year of work. Slightly less than 73% of the Ohio rural students expected an income of less than $25,000, and over 14% expected to earn over $30,000 in their first year of work.

Surety of Employment

Almost 22% of the Southwest Georgia rural students were completely sure of entering their expected occupation, 50.9% were very sure and about 27% were unsure of their expected occupations. Approximately 63% of the Ohio rural students were sure that their occupational choice would be realized, while about 37% were not sure as to the realization of their occupational choice.

Conclusions and Discussion

The population makeup of the schools are very different with Southwest Georgia rural schools having a Black enrollment of over 80%, and rural Ohio schools have an almost all White enrollment.

Ohio rural students enjoy a slightly higher standard of living with the socioeconomic status of rural Ohio families being slightly higher than the socioeconomic status of Southwest Georgia families, and on the average Georgia students had over one more sibling per family.

The rural Ohio and Georgia parents had similar educational attainment levels with Ohio parents having slightly more collegiate and advanced education which could contribute to the slightly higher socioeconomic status that Ohio Parents enjoy.

A higher percentage of the Ohio students planned to attend four year colleges and universities than Georgia students. The Ohio students idealistically aspired and realistically expected to enter higher status occupations than the Southwest Georgia students. Ohio students indicated they were more confident of entering their chosen occupations.

Policy-makers should review these data to obtain a better realization of regional differences existing in schools and student background characteristics. Policies should be designed to meet the unique needs of students. National policies may not have equal import in all cultures.

Table 1

Comparisons on Personal Background Characteristics of Ohio and Southwest Georgia Twelfth Grade Students Studied

Variables	School Location	
	Ohio	Southwest Georgia
Gender		
Female	51.0%	53.2%
Male	49.0%	45.7%
Ethnic Background		
White	94.1%	24.0%
Non-White	5.9%	76.0%
Program Curriculum		
Academic	58.0%	38.0%
General	22.9%	33.5%
Vocational	19.1%	28.5%
Extra-Curricular Activity	3.6	3.4
Socioeconomic Status	30.8	25.7
Fathers' Educational Attainment		
Less than high school	13.7%	22.5%
High school	51.3%	50.9%
Bus./technical school	8.8%	9.0%
Junior college	5.9%	4.1%

(Table continued)

Variables	School Location	
	Ohio	Southwest Georgia
Four year college	9.5%	7.9%
Advanced degree	4.0%	3.4%
Mothers' Educational Attainment		
Less than high school	7.1%	14.6%
High school	58.3%	59.9%
Bus./technical school	11.1%	7.5%
Junior college	5.5%	7.9%
Four year college	8.4%	4.9%
Advanced degree	2.9%	4.1%
Parental Discussions		
Discussed plans	94.1%	97.5%
No discussions	5.9%	2.2%
Parental Expectations		
Yes	60.8%	71.9%
No	22.7%	7.5%
Not sure	16.5%	20.2%
Number of Siblings	2.8	3.5

Table 2

Comparisons on Educational and Occupational Aspirations and Expectations of Ohio and Southwest Georgia Twelfth Grade Students Studied

Variables	School Location	
	Ohio	Southwest Georgia
Plans for Advanced Education		
Will attend college	73.5%	80.6%
Will not attend college	11.3%	3.7%
Not sure	15.1%	15.4%
Type of Planned Advanced Education		
Four year college	47.2%	32.2%
Technical college	29.7%	22.5%
Junior college	5.1%	17.6%
Do not know	10.8%	13.9%
Don't plan to attend	7.2%	13.5%
When Advanced Eduction Would Begin		
After high school	61.6%	48.3%
After military service	5.9%	11.6%
After working few years	10.4%	6.0%
No definite plans	15.5%	19.1%
Don't plan to attend	6.6%	14.2%
Idealistic Occupation	58.0	49.4
Realistic Occupation	54.0	45.7

(Table continued)

Variables	School Location	
	Ohio	Southwest Georgia
Expected Income		
less than $15,000	14.7%	8.6%
15,000-19,999	30.9%	30.0%
20,000-24,999	27.1%	15.7%
25,000-29,999	13.2%	18.4%
30,000-34,999	8.2%	15.7%
Over $35,000	5.9%	9.4%
Surety of Employment		
Sure	63.0%	72.6%
Unsure	37.1%	27.4%
Time When Occupational Choice Was Made		
Have not decided	5.5%	0.0%
Prior to sixth grade	3.6%	3.4%
Seventh or eighth grade	6.3%	4.8%
Ninth or tenth grade	23.3%	26.2%
Eleventh or twelfth grade	61.3%	64.8%

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